

*Awake, Arise, and Come Unto Christ*  
Sheri Dew

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A friend who knew I was rewriting this address for the umpteenth time pointed out this scripture: “Better is the end of the thing than the beginning thereof” (Ecclesiastes 7:8). She thought she was encouraging me to finish. I thought she meant that the best part of this message will be when I sit down. Either way, it is pure joy to be with you! I love you, and I am deeply grateful for this privilege. I have pled for the Spirit to teach each of us what the Lord wants us to learn.

In this audience are sisters coping with every situation imaginable. Some of you have never been happier. Others are grappling with unseen ordeals, weeping into your pillows at night, then putting on a brave smile and facing another day. I know. I've experienced both.

It is because of the range of our experiences that we as women can be a tough crowd. We sometimes pounce if a speaker doesn't say just what we want to hear. But here is the reality: We each have our own customized opportunities to deal with disappointment, yet our disappointments don't change the doctrine. My heartache about not yet marrying or bearing children in this life does not change the doctrine about marriage or motherhood. None of our lives are perfect, and neither are we. Nonetheless, in the spirit of not offending or overwhelming one another, it can be tempting to water down the message. But I don't want to run that risk today. I believe in *who you are* too much to soft-peddle the truth. So today, I wish to speak the unvarnished truth. My message is a plea and an expression of complete confidence in us.

Recently I learned a principle I should have understood but didn't—that it is actually easier to motivate someone to do something difficult than something easy. That's because the status quo is uninspiring. Our spirits *crave* to progress, and if we aren't moving forward, we're not happy. We believe in progression, and progression is by design difficult. How inspiring would it have been if our Father had said, “Be ye therefore mediocre”? Though our knees buckle at times under life's pressures, none of us wants to stay just like we are. Embedded within our spirits is the need to become more and more like our Father. We are far more motivated to do something difficult than something easy.

I remember when this truth crystallized for me. Last year, our publishing team announced their goal to place three books on the *New York Times* best-seller list. I said, “Terrific!” and walked back to my office thinking, “Zero chance.” We’d never charted even one book on that list. Well, that team pulled together, buckled down, and put books on *four* *New York Times* lists that year. They rallied to a seemingly impossible but inspiring cause.

My sisters, I invite you to rally to the most demanding but most inspiring of all causes—the cause of Jesus Christ—and to do what Moroni exhorted us to do, to “Awake, Arise, and Come Unto Christ” (see Moroni 10:31–32). I invite us to *awake* to who we are and to the expansive reach of our influence as women of God. To *arise* by making of our lives a ministry, as the Savior did. And to *come unto Christ* by walking away from the world.

One Saturday afternoon, I was scheduled to fly from Albany, New York to JFK International in New York City, and then home. I had plenty of time to connect at JFK—until the Albany flight was delayed more than an hour. By the time we finally landed at JFK and taxied to the tarmac where that little puddle jumper parked, I had four minutes to make my connection. I knew it was pointless, but I had the feeling I should at least try. So I grabbed my luggage and began running, heels and all, through a maze of construction cones, up two flights of stairs, and onto the concourse, dodging mothers pushing strollers as I ran.

With no time left, I spotted my gate, saw them closing the door to the jet-way, and yelled, “Don’t close that door!” The gate agent looked up, saw a middle-aged missile barreling towards him, laughed, and pulled the door back open. It *is not possible* to change planes at JFK in four minutes. But I *did*.

Now for the rest of the story. About midway through the flight home, I suddenly realized a man was kneeling next to my seat. (I’ve waited a long time for a man to kneel next to me.) He explained that he and his wife had been on vacation when they learned that her mother had died.

“My wife is so sad,” he said. Would you just talk with her?” As she and I talked, I realized we had a lot in common. I had been in a hotel room far away when I learned my brother had died. We spoke of losing loved ones without saying good-bye, and of the healing balm of the Savior.

I doubt the Lord cared at all that day about *my* schedule. But He cared about a grieving daughter. That’s why He gave me the airport miracle—for her, not for me. My airplane friend wrote later to say that our conversation had been an important turning point for her. At the time, I had no idea what that visit meant to her, nor how the Lord used it to teach her something significant about Him, but then, we rarely understand how the Lord uses us.

President Thomas S. Monson said, “We cannot escape the influence our lives have upon the lives of others.” My message today is about influence—*our* influence as latter-day women of God. Tragically, Lucifer has lulled us to sleep about the profound *kind* of influence our Father gave His daughters. We are a sleeping giant, the alarm clock is ringing, and it’s time to wake up.

There are five principles about influence we need to understand: first, we all have more influence than we think; second, righteous influence is a spiritual gift; third, having influence is not about elevating self but about lifting others; fourth, it isn’t possible NOT to have influence; and fifth, women of God have influence that has no limit and no end. With these principles in mind, consider what President Joseph F. Smith said to the Relief Society in 1914: “It is not for you to be led by the women of the world; it is for you to . . . lead the women of the world in everything that is praiseworthy, everything that is God-like, everything that is uplifting and . . . purifying to the children of men” (Relief Society General Board Minutes, 1914).

We are here to *influence* the world rather than to be influenced *by* the world. If we could unleash the *full* influence of covenant-keeping women, the kingdom of God would change overnight. No one has more influence on husbands than wives, on children than their mothers, or on young men than young women. Show me the women of *any* family or community, and I will show you the character and soul of that family and community. I repeat, if we would unleash the *full* influence of covenant-keeping women, the kingdom of God would change overnight.

This is why Satan has never underestimated us. He knows we are at the heart of the Father’s plan. So from the beginning, Lucifer has worked with a vengeance to distort the very definition of womanhood and to confuse everyone about us, including us.

Here are just a few of Lucifer’s lies: That men are smarter, have all the power, and are more important, so if we want to have influence we should be more like them; that marriage and family are confining; that motherhood is menial and a waste of any talented woman’s time; that women are perpetually frazzled and failing; and that a woman’s value is based on her size, shape and what she accomplishes outside the home.

Too many women have bought these lies. Our culture is disintegrating at the speed of light, and unfortunately, our gender is doing a lot of the damage. Sleazy, immoral, cunning women who flaunt their indiscretions jam the airwaves and monopolize magazine covers. Yet we watch their shows, donate to their causes, and even see them as models. I recently heard a talk-show host quoted in Relief Society. Come on, surely we haven’t become so numb that we would endorse an openly immoral celebrity in the Lord’s organization for women?

Other distortions are equally troubling. Consider this headline: “The World’s 100 Most Powerful Women” (*Forbes*, 17 September 2007). I bought this magazine because it made me mad. Every woman listed is a politician, an entertainer, or a CEO. I mean no

disrespect to any women listed. What I dispute is the bold distortion that in order to have influence, a woman must have money, fame, or a title. *That is a big, fat lie!*

Sisters, we're smarter than this. We know too much to fall for Lucifer's lies. If the world can't look to us for a *true* definition of womanhood, where can it look?

Here is the *truth* about womanhood. Our Father gave His daughters a divine endowment of gifts that give us unique influence. First and foremost, we have the high privilege of bearing children. If mortality is the time in *all* eternity to prove ourselves, then there is *nothing* more important than bearing children and leading them along the path home. President David O. McKay said that, "motherhood is the greatest potential *influence* . . . in human life" (*Improvement Era*, 1953, 452).

Our Father also gifted us with the nature to nurture, keen sensitivity to the Spirit, selflessness, discernment, and heroic faith. No wonder our Father placed us at the heart of the family and thus at the center of the plan of salvation. *We are* the Lord's secret weapon. Pre-mortally, when our Father described our role, we must have shouted for joy because of the ennobling stature He gave women in His kingdom. The world won't tell us this stunning truth, but the Spirit will.

By virtue of the fact that we are here today, covenant women during this culminating era, every one of us has a unique opportunity to change the world. It is time for us to *wake up* to the potential magnitude of our *full* influence as latter-day women of God and then to *arise* and do what we were sent here to do.

For twenty-nine years, we have been quoting a prophecy President Spencer W. Kimball made about us. Let's quote it one more time: "Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world . . . will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect *righteousness* and *articulateness* in their lives and to the degree that the women of the Church are seen as *distinct* and *different*—in happy ways—from the women of the world" (*Ensign*, November 1979, 103–4).

It has been three decades since that call to action. Are we *all that different* from the other good women of the world? Are we ever going to do more than just quote President Kimball? We have the gift of the Holy Ghost, a living prophet, spiritual gifts that magnify us, access to priesthood power, ordinances that endow us with knowledge and power, unique leadership training, and the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness. We should be *far* more distinctive than even the very finest women in the world. *But are we?* In our everyday lives, do we talk of Christ, rejoice in Christ, preach of Christ, and testify of Him (2 Nephi 25:26)? Are we women on a mission to build His kingdom?

Now, I am *not* saying we're not doing *lots* of good in the world. No women anywhere have done so much for so many so often. But I think we need to ask ourselves, "Are we the women God needs us to be in the latter part of the latter days?"

If it's any consolation, we're not the first generation to struggle with this. In 1873, Eliza R. Snow said to the Relief Society: "We are privileged above all other women-kind on the face of the earth . . . I have thought . . . how necessary for the Saints of the living God to be more of a distinct people than what they are . . . to be as different from the rest of the world as our privileges are more exalted—we should be a shining light to the nations of the earth. But I often say to myself, are we what we should be?" (*Woman's Exponent*, 14 August 1873, 62).

We may not be the first generation of sisters to be influenced by the world, but we *need* to be the last. We've just got to be the last. The Apostle Paul said it best: "It is *high time* to awake out of sleep . . . The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:11–12).

Sisters, it is *high time* for us to arise and have the influence God intended us to have. It is high time for us to lead the women of the world. It is high time for us to model the distinctiveness and happiness that sets true followers of Jesus Christ apart.

So how do we arise? In an early Relief Society meeting, the Prophet Joseph gave the women their marching orders, saying they should do the work the Savior had done (see RSGB Minutes, 26 May, 1842). The Savior "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45). If He came to minister, then so did we. What would change if you thought of your life as a ministry? I am not talking about church callings or service projects. Those come and go. I'm not talking about doing more, although it may mean doing things differently. I am talking about focus and perhaps further consecration.

Making of your life a ministry means consciously asking yourself in everyday situations, "Why has the Lord brought me here today?" and then looking for ways to build up people and the kingdom. It means asking the Lord what *He* needs you to do rather than feverishly working down *your* list of To-Do's that may or may not have lasting significance. Ministering might mean talking to your friends of other faiths about your spiritual journey or starting a blog to share what you believe online, or mentoring a young adult. It is our stewardship, after all, to pass along the legacy of what it means to be a woman of God to the next generation.

I recently heard a woman of another faith say she didn't think much of Mormons because she believed an LDS friend of hers wasn't allowed to participate at Church. What a tragic misperception! From the time we can string three words together, we're serving. There is no group of women anywhere who teach more, lead more, or speak more—or are better at it. Right now, hundreds of thousands of us are teaching children, youth, and adults. Hundreds of thousands more are serving in presidencies. I've looked, and I can't find any religion, government, or business where so many women have as much influence as in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But *we* are the only ones who can send that message. We are the ones who need to define Latter-day Saint womanhood, not anyone else. This means speaking up and reaching out. It means seeking to have influence in as many ways and with as many people as possible.

Those who think of life as a ministry tend to be less lonely, less likely to feel that life has spun out of control, more inclined to have a gentle heart, more filled with purpose.

We have a sterling example of ministering in President Monson. After President Hinckley's grave was dedicated, and while the entire General Authority cortege waited to depart, President Monson walked back to shake hands with every member of the extended Hinckley family. Reaching out one on one *is* President Monson. We will learn much about ministering if we'll be "quick to observe" our prophet (Mormon 1:2).

Those who make of their lives ministries understand that the influence to lift others comes from coming unto Christ. We speak of this all the time. But what does it really mean? Moroni answered that question: "Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength" (Moroni 10:32).

Said another way, coming unto Christ means walking away from the world. And walking away from the world means *choosing holiness and purity over worldliness and impurity*. Our Father wants us back, and He wants us back clean. We won't become perfect in this life, but we can become increasingly holy and pure. Pure in our thoughts, motives, and desires; pure in our actions and words. Pure in what we watch or take into our bodies. Pure in our hearts.

We choose holiness over the world *every time* we put the Savior first and love Him more than anyone or anything else. We choose holiness every time we walk away from clothes that are too short, too tight, too low, too high, too revealing, too anything that turns us into pornography. We choose holiness every time we walk away from *any media* that drives the Spirit away, every time we walk away from jealousy or unforgiveness.

We choose holiness every time we walk away from doing things to be seen of men—or women—and care more about how the Lord sees us than the women in the ward see us. Every time we pray about whom the Lord needs us to be rather than living to impress others.

Holiness means walking away from the philosophies of man. It means looking to prophets for spiritual counsel not celebrities, who may be appealing but who all come packing personal motives and an arsenal of half-truths. Some like Sherem have "much power of speech, according to the power of the devil" (Jacob 7:4). It is deadly to take counsel from *anyone* whose primary motive is to build their own kingdom.

We dare listen to the world only with our spiritual ears. Which is why we are commanded to pray always so we can "escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work" (D&C 10:5). Servants of Satan have pleasing voices that mix truth with a seductive ether that can put us into a spiritual coma and keep us from seeking truth from the true Source. *Beware* of those who profess Christ while spewing subtle anti-Christ statements. *Anyone* who professes to believe in Jesus Christ but denies His divinity, no matter how many good deeds they have done, is anti-Christ. *Anyone* who shifts our focus

away from making and keeping covenants is a servant of Satan. *Anything* that keeps us out of the temple or threatens the family is the work of Satan.

If we truly want to walk away from the world, *our single most important pursuit* is to seek to hear the voice of the Spirit. I don't think it will be possible to survive spiritually in the last days without the Holy Ghost as our constant guide. The Spirit is the ultimate protector and judge between good and evil. The Spirit can detect the slightest variance from truth and alert us to all spiritual danger, because the Holy Ghost speaks "of things as they *really* are" (Jacob 4:13), rather than as they appear to be, and shows us "all things what [we] should do" (2 Nephi 32:5).

There is no simple formula for learning to hear the voice of the Spirit. But purity is key, for it makes us a more pure receptacle. The scriptures are key, because they teach the language of revelation. The temple is key, for there we learn *how* to come out of the world and into the presence of God while in mortality. And regular personal worship is key.

I know a mother of nine who lives, teaches, and mothers by the Spirit. I was curious how she managed her own spiritual growth amidst the chaos of raising a large family. She explained that when their children were young, she asked her busy husband to set aside thirty minutes a day to help with the children so she could have uninterrupted time. "I spent fifteen minutes in my scriptures and fifteen minutes on my knees," she said, "and that regular focus made all the difference." I am not advocating her approach, just sharing what one busy mother did to make sure she had time to worship.

Sisters, could we take more time to become more holy? If our lives are so busy that we don't have time for personal worship, something needs to change. President Kimball taught that, "the Almighty is with this people. We shall have all the revelations that we shall need if we will do our duty and keep the commandments . . . *If there be ears to hear*, there will be revelations" (Conference Report, October 1966, 26). The Lord promised that if we will ask, we may, "receive revelation upon revelation" (D&C 42:61), but we have to have time to ask and time to learn how to hear.

If you're not sure what it sounds or feels like when the Holy Ghost speaks *to you*, ask the Lord to teach you, and over time your learnings will be remarkable. For me, nothing opens the heavens more than regular immersion in the scriptures and the temple. President Boyd K. Packer taught that, "if all you know is what you see with your natural eyes and hear with your natural ears, then you will not know very much" (*BYU Magazine*, Fall 2005, 63). I know that is true.

If we aren't willing to diligently seek to be holy by seeking the Spirit, the best we can do in this life is the best *WE* can do—meaning, we're limited to our own wisdom and judgment, which these days is spiritual suicide. The way to come out of the world, the way to have maximum righteous influence, is to live under the influence of the Holy Ghost.

Now, what is *our* potential influence as we and our sisters across the Earth rally together for the cause of Jesus Christ? Consider the collective power of one. What if every woman in Relief Society living near a temple went to the temple just one extra time this year? How much more revelation would flow into the homes of the Church? Or, what if we each did *one thing* this month to improve our ability to hear the voice of the Lord? Or one thing to become more pure? Or tuned out one talk show and studied scriptures instead? Or traded one lunch with friends for a day doing family history? Or went to cheer on one Laurel you're not related to. Notice how many times I have said *or*? What is *one thing* you could do?

Or—and here is the big question—what if every sister in Relief Society looked and prayed for *one* opportunity to share the gospel? It could be someone in your carpool or a longtime friend you've never had the courage to talk to about the Church. It could be simply looking for opportunities in everyday conversations to speak of our values and beliefs. Do the math. If every one of the 6 million of us helped convert just one person this year, next year there would be 12 million of us on the job. And the next year 24 million. And so on. Now, does this seem outrageous? Or, is it exactly what President Kimball foresaw—that *WE* would be a “significant force in both the *numerical* and *spiritual* growth of the Church in the last days.” I believe it, and I believe it's *high time* we make it happen. I'm going to try. Will you?

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said this: “Something is going to be asked of this dispensation that's never been asked before. [We] must be ready to present the Church of the Lamb, to the Lamb, and when that happens, we must be looking and acting like His Church” (*Church News*, 17 February 2007). This may seem impossible. But remember the airport miracle? With the Lord's help and our best effort, we will prevail. And although we'll make mistakes and get tired and sometimes fall short, our Father sent us now precisely because He knew we *would not stop* until we got the job done.

We are followers of Jesus Christ. And we have been His followers and have loved Him for a long, long time. Nothing is more important than working and sacrificing and enduring for Him. Let us be the generation of women that finally walks away from the world. If we will Awake to who we are, Arise by making of our lives ministries, and come unto Christ by steadily becoming more holy, we will have a degree of influence the world and the kingdom of God have never felt before—an influence that has no limit and no end. We can do this. I know we can.

I know that God is our Father, and that the only way to worship Him is by following His Son. I know the heavens are open, that angels minister, and that the Spirit speaks. And I know that Jesus Christ can heal us, strengthen us, sanctify us, lift us, and redeem us. I testify that the power to have righteous influence comes when the Atonement changes our hearts.